

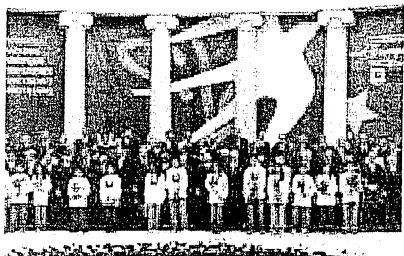


17/4/2003

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**European Conference: Declaration (17/4/03)**

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The countries of the enlarged European Conference, with the participation of Russia, met at the Heads of State and Government level in Athens on April 17, 2003.

The participating Heads of State and Government recognized that the countries and peoples of Europe have come a long way towards forging a community of values based on democracy, the rule of law and the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms. Moving towards our common values has enabled us to create bonds of trust between countries and peoples and to gradually establish and expand prosperity and security. The current enlargement of the European Union is a testimony to the spirit that now prevails on our continent and brings forward the reality of political and economic interdependence between the Union and its neighbors, both to the South and East.

It is at this moment of historic significance that the Heads of State and Government have met in order to reaffirm their determination not to tolerate any new dividing lines, to agree to promote policies of political rapprochement and gradual integration in social and economic structures between the enlarged European Union and its neighbors and to accelerate the political, economic and cultural dynamism on the European continent and beyond.

Based on historic links, geographic proximity and shared political and economic values, the participating countries exchanged views on an inclusive vision for the years to come and agreed to work in partnership in order to achieve concrete progress in sectors of common interest. They underlined that their shared neighborhood should benefit from the European Union's enlargement policy, which remains a distinct process.

Heads of State and Government confirmed that priority should be given to the creation of an area of peace, stability, prosperity and social progress and to strengthening cooperation on issues that impact directly on the lives of all citizens.

In this context, they underlined the importance of:

- Promoting shared values, including respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law;
- Preventing and combating common security threats, including organized and transnational crime, trafficking in human beings, terrorism, and communicable diseases;
- Promoting mutual trade and investment, market opening and gradual integration in economic structures both between the members of the European Conference and globally;
- Supporting integration into the global trading system;
- Promoting sustainable development, including preventing and combating environmental hazards;
- Ensuring interconnected transport, energy and telecommunications Networks;
- Increasing cultural cooperation, the free flow of ideas and people-to-people contacts;
- Promoting transnational and cross-border co-operation, and further improving and streamlining of various cross-border instruments;
- Engaging relevant international organizations, as appropriate.

For the purposes of implementation, flexible instruments are required and actions tailored to specific needs with a differentiated approach and conditional on meeting agreed targets for progress.

The countries of the enlarged European Conference and Russia welcomed the internal debate that has been launched in the European Union on a new neighborhood policy. They welcomed the idea that relations with the new Eastern European neighbors should be further developed as well as the relationship which the EU has established with its Mediterranean partners within the Barcelona process.